"Twin Peaks," Episodes 1 & 2 Recap: Do Not Drop Up

Twin Peaks Recap *is a weekly column by Keith Uhlich covering David Lynch and Mark Frost's limited, 18-episode continuation of the* Twin Peaks *television series.*



The world's gone mad. Fortunately for FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan), he's been able to sit out most of the real-life insanity of the last 25 years. Unfortunately—as surely known by those viewers familiar with Mark Frost and David Lynch's singular television series *Twin Peaks,* which returned Sunday, May 21st for a limited, 18-episode run on Showtime—that's because he's been trapped in the unearthly purgatory known as the Black Lodge, all while his devilish doppelgänger, a mortal manifestation of the murderous spirit known as Killer Bob, runs amok among mankind.

Already it feels like I'm speaking in tongues. But if *Twin Peaks* and Lynch (who directed, co-wrote, co-edited, and designed the sound for all of these new episodes) have taught us anything, it's that it's okay to lose the thread. It's alright to slow down. It's perfectly fine to be still and to wait—oftentimes impatiently—in whatever surroundings you may find yourself. "The world spins," as a lyric from the Lynch-co-penned, Julee Cruise-crooned ballad goes, though it's of course the instrumental version of the Angelo Badalamenti-composed "Falling" that ushers us back, over the reworked opening credits, into Frost and Lynch's topsy-turvy terrain.

Immediately obvious: Which way is up? The manner in which Lynch and cinematographer Peter Deming film the town waterfall and the billowing red curtains of the Black Lodge suggest that gravity itself has no place here. In a later sequence in the first two episodes, which premiered in a single two-hour bloc, Lynch makes sure we catch sight of a cardboard box emblazoned with "Do Not Drop Up." Though there's a clear break between

the third and fourth words (it's literally two commands, not one), the mood the director conjures screws with our perception of normal syntax. Sense becomes nonsense becomes sense. And so boxes can be dropped up.

Speaking of boxes, there's a doozy of one in these first two installments. It's housed in an upper floor of a decrepit Manhattan building, one of those rickety structures where every sound (distant and near) echoes ominously. And it's overseen only by a monosyllabic security guard (Michael Bisping) with different colored eyes, and a college student, Sam (Benjamin Rosenfield), whose main job, aside from keeping a barrage of digital cameras loaded and running, is to sit and watch the life-size, plexiglass container, waiting for something, anything, to happen.

If the early parts of a movie or television show (especially something as auteur-driven as this one) give us a sense of how to watch it as a whole, then this is likely the new *Twin Peaks'*s key sequence: Watch. Wait. Something may occur. Or it may not. Learn to live with the duration, with the beautiful monotony. Impatience, boredom, irritation, agitation (all very grounding human emotions) segue into a more transcendental state of mind. It's telling that it's only after Sam and his gorgeous crush, Tracey (Madeline Zima)—who he unwisely sneaks into the box's key-coded vault—succumb to fleshly distractions that they become grist for the ethereal mill, both of them devoured by a faceless ghoul that, in its herky-jerky unrealness, is pure nightmare fuel.

There's always been a prurient streak in Lynch's work, especially when it comes to sex and its potential for destruction. Yet there's also something erotic about how he mangles human flesh, as if the innumerable ways a body can be torn apart is, for him, sculptural. You feel the fingers of the artist in every wound. This informs several of the scenes involving Cooper's long-haired, parodically macho doppelgänger, who is introduced driving a Mercedes along a lonely nighttime road, after which he proceeds to twice take down the same shotgun-toting redneck. The intentions of this alter-world version of the honorable Dale C. are somewhat muddy beyond his desire to stay far, far away from the Black Lodge. In the early going, he mainly exists to threateningly pose and preen, all the while recalling the unchecked ids of many a prior Lynch antihero. His unrepentant misogyny is pure Frank Booth (from *Blue Velvet*) and his scaly overshirt mirrors the snake-skin jacket beloved by Nicolas Cage's Sailor Ripley in *Wild at Heart.* (There's a degree, one suspects, to which Lynch is approaching this new *Twin Peaks* as a self-referential, summative work, though he'd surely talk around that if asked.)

In one of the longest scenes in the premiere, Evil Cooper interrogates a scantily-clad, disloyal henchwoman named Darya (Nicole LaLiberte) in a seedy motel room. He holds her much too close for comfort and punctuates his psychotic purring with several punches

to her face. It's ugly and discomfiting, and builds, with pit-of-the-stomach anxiety, to a moment in which Darya is smothered with a pillow and shot point blank. Soon after this happens, Lynch cuts to a wide shot of Darya's body lying lifeless on the bed, the pillow acting as a kind of perverse substitute head. And it's, strangely, as if you've never seen anything more beautiful. Annihilation begets artistry, and Lynch only ups the perversity by having Evil Cooper walk to the next room where awaits…Jennifer Jason Leigh!…as a horned-up henchwoman named Chantal! "Oh…*you're* nice and wet," he says to her, before the scene fades like a *Laugh-In* blackout gag.

There are frequent shifts in tone in the new *Peaks*, and this is especially true whenever a familiar face shows up. Among the old friends who reappear: Russ Tamblyn as Dr. Lawrence Jacoby (on the receiving end of a mysterious delivery of shovels); Margaret "The Log Lady" Lanterman (the late Catherine Coulson, whose clearly ailing appearance lends her every line of dialogue a near-unbearable pathos); and hotelier brothers Ben and Jerry Horne (Richard Beymer and David Patrick Kelley) who basically do an Abbott and Costello routine revolving around marijuana edibles.

And, of course, there's the animated corpse at the center of all *Peaks* lore—Sheryl Lee's murdered homecoming queen Laura Palmer, who once again materializes (aged, but still ravishing) to the good Cooper in the Black Lodge. "I am dead…yet I live," she intones (and this just before she literally pulls off her face, revealing a blinding white light). Her elliptical pronouncement manages to address the contradictions of her character (the lifeless body that still managed to act as a secrets-revealing catalyst), as well of the very work of art (boxes within boxes, many of them filled with dead air to which only a viewer can give life) that we're watching. There's no netherworld of nonexistence in which I'd rather spend a summer.

MORE SLICES OF PIE

• It's a real honor to recap the new *Twin Peaks* (my thanks to my editor, Daniel Kasman, for the opportunity), but I'd be lying if I didn't say it was also a daunting challenge. Lynch's artistry doesn't lend itself easily to the point-by-point plot synopsis/analysis of a standard recap. This is a clear case of not the "what" but the "how," so it's probable there will be numerous sequences and other story threads that I'll neglect in the main body of each article (though I'll attempt to note them all in the bullet points section) so as to hone in on a certain theme or throughline of interest. For me personally, it's nice to know that this is one of those rare works of art that *can't* be grasped from all the usual angles.

• I theorized about who would be the first character onscreen, and it turned out to be Carel Struycken's Black Lodge-residing Giant (though he's listed as "????????" in the end credits). He gives Cooper several vague clues as to the quest ahead ("430"; "Richard and

Linda"). Then the Giant says, with great sadness, "You are far away" before our special agent vanishes in a creepy digital glitch.

• The Ben and Jerry Horne sequence introduces one of the revival series' many new characters—Ashley Judd's devoted secretary Beverly. Jerry proceeds to tease an exasperated Ben about whether he's slept with her or not. Nice to see a bit of the old brotherly petulance.

• In the scene in which Evil Cooper visits with a group of rednecks, one of them, the extremely Lynchian-looking Buella (Kathleen Deming), responds to their visitor's negative appraisal of the hired help with "It's a world of truck drivers"—another finely honed line among many in the premiere.

• There's an entire section of the first two episodes that takes place in Buckhorn, South Dakota, and features Jane Adams and Brent Briscoe as detectives investigating the murder of a woman named Ruth Davenport (Mary Stofle), whose severed head is found placed atop the body of a male John Doe. Their main suspect is a high school principal named Bill Hastings, played by a terrific (and terrified) Matthew Lillard ("Please tell me what's going on," he says at one point, with a nice aura of meta-awareness). Hastings's wife Phyllis (Cornelia Guest) appears to be framing him, and the story eventually dovetails with Evil Cooper's plot thread. His parting line to Phyllis before he shoots her ("You follow human nature perfectly") has a deliciously cynical ring to it.

• More returning *Peaks* characters: Deputy Chief Tommy 'Hawk' Hill (Michael Horse), Deputy Andy Brennan (Harry Goaz) and receptionist Lucy Moran Brennan (Kimmy Robertson). The Log Lady tasks Hawk (over the phone) with looking into Cooper's case, and Andy and Lucy lend comical support. "Something is missing and you have to find it," the Log Lady says to Hawk. His gentle sign-off to her, "Goodnight, Margaret" is a real tearjerker.

• A brief sojourn to Las Vegas (this *Peaks* apparently takes place all over the country) introduces an industrialist named Mr. Todd played by Lynch alum Patrick Fischler, one of the victims of the vagrant restaurant ghost in *Mulholland Drive.* Here, he hints at someone pulling the strings behind the scenes—likely Evil Cooper, by the weak-willed way he attempts to maintain his composure while talking about his unseen business partner.

• In addition to Laura Palmer, Part 2's lengthy Black Lodge/Red Room sequence features Al Strobel's Phillip Michael Gerard, aka the One-Armed Man, the white horse that often appears to Laura's mother Sarah (Grace Zabriskie), and Ray Wise's ever-tortured Leland Palmer, who instructs Cooper to find his daughter. Then there's the matter of The Arm, aka The Man From Another Place, the dancing, backwards-speaking dwarf played by

Michael J. Anderson in the original series. Anderson and Lynch had something of a public falling out, so he's been replaced here by one of the filmmaker's oddest creations, a tree that spouts electric charges and has what looks like a burned matchhead for a noggin. It's certainly a unique kind of recasting.

• Let us all sing the praises of Grace Zabriskie, who returns as Sarah Palmer toward the end of the premiere, drinking herself into a stupor while watching a nature documentary in which lions rip apart some prey. The alternately aroused and repelled way she reacts to one of the wildcats chomping down on the poor beast's head is chilling.

• The episode concludes in the good ol' Roadhouse, where the electronic band The Chromatics sing their song "Shadow" and several other *Peaks* characters, new and old, make first appearances. There's Shelly Johnson (Mädchen Amick), talking with a group of girlfriends about her daughter's love life. There's Balthazar Getty, as a new character named Red, winking at Shelly from afar. Behind him is Walter Olkewicz, tending bar as, apparently, a relative of the first season and *Fire Walk With Me*'s villainous drug mule Jacques Renault. (He's listed in the end credits as Jean-Michel Renault.) And finally, there's biker James Hurley (James Marshall), a little worse for wear after a bike accident, though Shelly makes sure to say, with such lovely sincerity and genuineness, "James is still cool. He's always been cool."